



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

POLICY AND STRATEGY

Child poverty: income maximisation action plan 2020 to 2021

What we are doing to help maximise the income of families living in poverty.

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Ministerial foreword

I am proud to be a member of a Welsh Government that has always put children and children's rights at the heart of everything it does. Tackling child poverty has been, and continues to be, a priority for all Ministers in this government.

The Welsh Government's Child Poverty Strategy sets out objectives for tackling child poverty. Continued focus and investment in what we know works in tackling poverty using the levers available to us is vital. This includes continuing to strengthen families and communities through our early intervention and prevention programmes Flying Start and Families First, further developing an Early Childhood Care and Education system, improving employability and creating secure, fair work, including promoting the Welsh Living Wage.

Our Programme for Government made a commitment to re-engineer existing funded programmes to ensure that they have the maximum impact on the lives

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of children living in poverty. To support this commitment, we have continued to review what more Welsh Government can do to reduce costs for families, boost incomes and ensure the investment in programmes and services which contribute to tackling poverty is improving outcomes for children and young people, both in the short term and in the long term.

Never has there been a more important time to do all that we practically can to mitigate the impacts of poverty. Child poverty is unacceptable and levels in Wales remain stubbornly high. **Our most recent data show us almost one in three children (28%) are currently living in relative income poverty (after housing costs)**. In March 2018 the Equality and Human Rights Commission reported that the UK Government tax and welfare reforms would push an extra 50,000 children in Wales into poverty by 2021-22. The Coronavirus crisis will worsen this picture. It is not possible at this stage to say how big an impact it will have however, **initial analysis predicts 200,000 more children across the UK could be living below the poverty line by the end of 2020**.

We appreciate the contribution that stakeholders and partners make to our work on poverty. The action plan which follows reflects that contribution and given the acute financial pressures many families are likely to be experiencing as a result of the pandemic we want to focus on things we can do now. Ministers have agreed a set of practical actions that we will work on over the next six months to help maximise the incomes of families living in poverty in Wales and support them to build their financial resilience.

Julie James MS

Minister for Housing and Local Government.

Objective 1: Families in Wales are supported to claim all the financial support they are entitled to

Actions

Activities and milestones

1.1 Implement a communications strategy to raise public awareness of existing benefits, services and programmes to alleviate income poverty.

October 2020 - November 2020

Require the third sector and local authorities to promote awareness of available benefits and other financial support via traditional media, social media and existing programmes and networks.

1.2 Run targeted activities to raise awareness of benefit entitlements, encourage take-up and facilitate longer term behavioural change amongst groups least likely to claim the financial support they are entitled to.

October 2020 - March 2021

Provide funding for six pilot projects across Wales to raise awareness of benefit entitlements and give people support to maximise their income amongst specific priority groups including:-

- BAME households;
- families with disabled children/disabled adult(s);
- people experiencing domestic violence
- low income households

1.3 Prepare and deliver focussed information packs and awareness raising training for frontline workers and trusted intermediaries who support children and families living in poverty.

October 2020 - March 2021

Commission an external provider to develop and deliver information packs and training for frontline workers (including family support workers; housing support workers; community leaders; community health teams) and challenge them to provide income maximisation support to families living in poverty.

An evaluation of the programme will identify the percentage of participants reporting

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Actions	Activities and milestones
1.4 Action Research Pilot to deliver increased advice and support on welfare benefits through existing family support models, to help maximise income.	<p>improved knowledge of welfare benefits and ability to better support service users.</p> <p>October 2020 – March 2021</p> <p>Identification of local authorities to participate in the action research pilot.</p> <p>Provision of funding for training element of the pilot to be awarded to local authorities and providers secured.</p> <p>Intensive training to be delivered to cohort of support workers within selected local authorities.</p> <p>Monitor and evaluate the implementation and utilisation of increased knowledge and skills amongst participants and track the impacts on individuals and families.</p>
1.5 Deliver a system of ‘passporting’ between local authority benefits making it easier and quicker to apply for support in Wales.	<p>October 2020 - December 2020</p> <p>Identification of local authorities demonstrating best practice in simplifying claims processes.</p> <p>Work with these local authorities as ‘pioneers’ to share best practice across regional cluster groups.</p> <p>November 2020 - March 2021</p> <p>Establish a Task and Finish Group with relevant partners to unlock and overcome any barriers to change and require all local authorities to adopt best practice.</p>

Actions	Activities and milestones
	<p>January 2021 – March 2021</p> <p>Work with ‘pioneer’ local authorities to develop guidance and share as an online resource across Wales.</p>
<p>1.6 Adopt a ‘no wrong door’ approach across tackling poverty programmes and services, including ‘warm referrals’ between services where possible.</p>	<p>October 2020 – November 2020</p> <p>Undertake a mapping exercise to better understand how local authorities and other delivery partners across Wales are currently implementing a ‘no wrong door’ approach via the use of ‘single entry points’ and early help hubs.</p> <p>November 2020 – December 2020</p> <p>Audit existing data sharing arrangements within and between different agencies to help facilitate ‘warm referrals’ between services.</p> <p>December 2020 – March 2021</p> <p>Develop guidance for adopting ‘single entry points’ to support, linking across key agencies, services and employability programmes.</p> <p>Require the third sector, health and local authorities to implement a ‘no wrong door’ and ‘warm referral’ approach between relevant programmes and advice services in Wales.</p>
<p>1.7 Continue to work with partners to help all families seeking asylum in Wales have access to relevant advice and support services.</p>	<p>September 2020 - February 2021</p> <p>Delivery of expert training for local authority</p>

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Actions**Activities and milestones**

Housing and Social Services officers to understand migrant rights and entitlements, including those with no recourse to 'public funds'.

October 2020 - March 2021

Procurement and publication of expert guidance for local authorities to understand their responsibilities and routes to support for those who have no recourse to 'public funds'.

Implement recommendations to extend and professionalise hosting solutions for those who cannot access other housing options.

Strongly encourage local authorities to use their discretion to provide free school meals to children from families who have no recourse to 'public funds' and who are not otherwise eligible.

Require local authorities to provide emergency accommodation and support to anyone who is homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic, regardless of their immigration status.

Advocate for changes to the UK Government Immigration system which mitigate and prevent poverty amongst migrant families.

Undertake prevention work to encourage EU Citizens to register for Settled Status, thereby avoiding becoming no recourse to 'public funds' after June 2021.

1.8 Share best practice of how community hubs and other venues are bringing October 2020 - November 2020

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Actions	Activities and milestones
<p>access to a range of programmes, services and agencies together in one place.</p>	<p>Identify best practice models across Wales, building on examples from Denbighshire, Flintshire, Newport, Cardiff and Swansea of providing information and advice in different community settings.</p>
<p>1.9 Continue to undertake community engagement through existing stakeholder networks and frontline support workers to gather further intelligence and data about how families living in poverty are being impacted by the current crisis in real time and consider appropriate solutions.</p>	<p>November 2020 – March 2021</p> <p>Share learning via online resources and stakeholder networks to challenge wider reach and participation in community events.</p> <hr/> <p>October 2020 – November 2020</p> <p>Develop further existing internal and external stakeholder networks.</p> <p>November 2020 – March 2021</p> <p>Ensure all relevant information and/or data is communicated via stakeholder networks and seek regular feedback.</p> <p>Compile all relevant intelligence and data to test against the actions being implemented through this Plan and inform future evidenced based policy development in this area.</p>

Objective 2: The cost of sending children to school is reduced

Actions	Activities and milestones
2.1 Tackle known barriers to the take up of free school meals (FSM) and Pupil Development Grant (PDG)-Access across Wales.	<p>By December 2020</p> <p>Conduct an internal staged review of free school meal provision during the COVID-19 pandemic, identifying lessons learned and whether there are practices which can be adopted longer term. The first stage (March to September 2020) will be completed by the end of November 2020.</p> <p>October 2020 – March 2021</p> <p>Challenge local authorities to make the processes for claiming free school meals and PDG-Access as simple and straightforward as possible (see Action 1.5).</p> <p>Analyse the results of the Welsh Government communications campaign to promote PDG-Access and indications of take up during October.</p> <p>January 2021</p> <p>Make a decision on eligibility criteria and support for PDG-Access provision.</p>
2.2 Work with local authorities to offer a free school breakfast to year 7 pupils eligible for free school meals.	<p>January 2021</p> <p>Introduce a breakfast allowance for year 7 pupils who are eligible for free school meals.</p>
2.3 Ensure all pupils entitled to free school meals will continue to receive	Ongoing

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Actions	Activities and milestones
provisions if they are shielding or have to self-isolate.	Provision of £420K has been made available for this purpose and the situation is being kept under close review.
2.4 Continue to make available additional funding for the provision of free school meals during school holidays.	<p>October - Easter 2021</p> <p>£11 million has been made available to local authorities to put in place measures to ensure children eligible for free school meals continue to benefit from provision during school holidays up to and including Easter 2021. £700K of this funding has been allocated to support colleges with the equivalent provision for eligible learners.</p>
2.5 Promote the updated statutory guidance on school uniform policies, including the need for governing bodies to prioritise cost and affordability.	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Implement activities that promote the updated statutory guidance on school uniform policies, including the need for governing bodies to prioritise cost and affordability.</p>
2.6 Continue to provide funding to ensure period products are free in schools and colleges to combat period poverty.	<p>January 2021</p> <p>Publish a Period Dignity Strategic Action Plan for Wales which will address the continued provision of free products and tackle the stigma and taboos which continue to surround periods.</p>
2.7 Continue to centrally license the Microsoft tools (Office and Minecraft: Education Edition) for all maintained schools in Wales through the Hwb EdTech programme. This allows for the software to be used in school, and also for all teachers and learners to install on	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Provide software to be used in school, and also for all teachers and learners to install on their personal devices at home.</p> <p>Promote through social media and Hwb</p>

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Actions	Activities and milestones
their personal devices at home.	platform, in conjunction with schools and local authorities across Wales.
2.8 Ensuring guidance for the Whole School Approach to mental health incorporates available resources to help understand the impact of poverty.	September 2020 - December 2020 Revise and implement guidance on the Whole School Approach to include resources on the impact of poverty such as 'Price of Pupil Poverty Guides' and 'Check with Ceri' resource.
2.9 Working with other public bodies, including Sports Wales, National Museum Wales and the Arts Council for Wales, to maximise the impact of activities undertaken outside school which enrich the lives of children in poverty and promote equality of opportunity.	October 2020 – December 2020 Share resources developed for schools with other public bodies to help them better understand the impact of poverty on children and young people.

Objective 3: The cost and accessibility of public transport for young people is addressed

Actions	Activities and milestones
3.1 Prioritising access and affordability of public transport for young people, especially young people living in poverty.	January 2021 Implement a Communications campaign to publicise existing measures for free rail travel for under 11s, and discounted rail travel for under 18s. Progressing the campaign will be dependent on COVID-19 restrictions and the importance of safe travel during the pandemic as they are at January 2021. Ongoing

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Actions**Activities and milestones**

Continue to pilot new and innovative ways of providing integrated and demand responsive bus services to improve connectivity and access to essential services, such as education and health, in both urban and rural areas. The 'Fflecsi' pilots are at various stages of development in areas including Pembrokeshire, Conwy, Blaenau Gwent and Newport. The outcome of the pilots will help inform the network specification we require in the future.

November 2020

The draft Wales Transport Strategy will be published for consultation. The Strategy will address the affordability of public transport for all those with protected characteristics, including children and young people.

August 2020 - March 2021

Continue work on the Learner Travel Review, working closely with the Children's Commissioner, Welsh Language Commissioner and local authorities, to inform possible changes to the Learner Travel Measure.

October 2020 – March 2021

Work with Transport for Wales to develop a Community Rail Partnership in the South Wales Valleys, where the views of a variety of groups are being considered, including children and young people living in poverty.

Objective 4: Families in Wales are supported to be financially resilient

Actions

Activities and milestones

4.1 Stepping up debt advice provision and support, utilising the additional Financial Levy funding recently allocated to Welsh Government.

August 2020 - March 2021

Increase capacity through the Single Advice Fund to target debt advice and wraparound support services at Private Rented Sector (PRS) tenants to ensure sustainable pathways out of debt.

Ongoing

A Task and Finish Group of key internal and external stakeholders has been established to predict the financial implications of the crisis and recommend initiatives and policies that will support people to better maintain their financial commitments.

4.2 Ensuring financial inclusion remains a key priority including continued investment in advice services; action to increase access to affordable credit through Credit Unions, and improving financial education for children and their parents/guardians.

August 2020 - March 2021

Continued investment in advice services by extending grant funding for the Single Advice Fund until the end of the financial year has been agreed.

Work with the Money Advice and Pension Service (MaPS) to develop a Financial Well-being Plan for Wales which will include actions to promote access to affordable credit and improving financial education for children and their parents/guardians.

4.3 Maintaining the flexibilities in the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) which were introduced in response to the impact of COVID-19 on households suffering extreme hardship.

August 2020 - March 2021

Extending the temporary flexibilities in DAF until the end of the financial year to support households experiencing increased hardship related to

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Actions	Activities and milestones
	<p>COVID-19, including where there is a delay in receiving their first Universal Credit payment has been agreed.</p> <p>As part of a post-COVID (beyond March) exit strategy decide whether to revert the flexibilities to a pre-COVID state or to retain the new arrangements “permanently”.</p>
<p>4.4 Further develop the DAF referral system to the Single Advice Fund (SAF) to maximise opportunities to address the medium to longer term needs of DAF recipients.</p>	<p>October 2020 - March 2021</p> <p>The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be developed and agreed between the DAF and SAF lead organisation, and the referral pathway will be put in place.</p>
<p>4.5 Bringing forward proposals under the revised Fuel Poverty Strategy to better support households, especially families with young children, to save money by securing better energy deals and exploiting the benefits of smart metering.</p>	<p>January 2021 – March 2021</p> <p>Run a pilot project to develop Domestic Energy Advice and Support Services. The project will run in a number of trial areas over a period of nine months. It will provide evidence on how advice and support services can help lower income households reduce their fuel bills, maximise their income, and improve the energy performance of their homes.</p> <p>The outcome of the pilot will inform how energy efficiency advice and support services to lower income households with young families can be provided in future years.</p> <p>September 2020 – December 2020</p> <p>Consult on the draft fuel poverty plan 2020-2035. The draft plan sets out four policy goals, recommended targets to be achieved by 2035 and</p>

Actions	Activities and milestones
<p>4.6 Reviewing guidance on the provision of social tariffs by water suppliers in Wales to provide more rounded advice on water affordability and efficiency.</p>	<p>ten short term actions to be completed within two years.</p> <p>February 2021 Final fuel poverty plan to be published.</p> <p>October 2020 – March 2021</p> <p>The Consumer Council for Water has been commissioned to undertake a review of social tariffs.</p>

Response to the Coronavirus crisis

We have supported Welsh families through the Coronavirus pandemic in an effort to mitigate the impacts of the crisis on children living in poverty. This investment includes:

- £40m additional funding to ensure continued provision of Free School Meals for eligible pupils whilst they were unable to attend school up to the end of August.
- £1.28m to help local authorities meet additional costs with Free School Meal provision during the first two weeks of the autumn term whilst some schools adopted a flexible approach to pupils returning to school full time.
- £420,000 to ensure pupils who are in receipt of Free School Meals continue to receive provision if they are not able to attend school because they are shielding or have to self-isolate.

School holidays

- £2.6m to help local authorities provide childcare and play provision over the Summer 2020.

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Period Poverty

- Local Authorities ensured schools distributed up to 3 months of period products to learners who needed them prior to school closures in March. Where this was not possible schools delivered products alongside Free School Meal provision. We also enabled flexibility in delivery of products to allow local authorities to distribute products via community mechanisms.

Digital learning

- £3m to support 'digitally excluded' learners as part of our 'Stay Safe. Stay Learning' programme. Local authorities, worked closely with their schools to provide digitally excluded learners with repurposed school devices and 4G MiFi connectivity where required. Replacement devices were also funded for schools out of the wider Hwb infrastructure programme.

Food Poverty

- Over £1m for projects related to food distribution to vulnerable people under our new Voluntary Services Emergency Fund grant scheme.
- Over £98,000 was allocated to FareShare Cymru to develop a sustainable mechanism for tackling food poverty and addressing food insecurity in North Wales through the redistribution of surplus food.
- £2m to support action to tackle food poverty and address food insecurity as part of preparations for Brexit. The Fund has supported access to and distribution of greater quantities of surplus food into the emergency food supply network. It has also supported the provision of additional transport and storage for community food organisations, including cold storage.

Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF)

- An extra £13.9m funding added to the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) to help support individuals and families across Wales with the additional financial pressures and challenges they face in light of the COVID-19

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outbreak.

- The rules for claiming support from the DAF relaxed to support those that have experienced a loss of income or incurred additional expenses as a result of COVID-19.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme

- £2.85m has been made available for local authorities in Wales to help meet the increase in applications to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

Advice Services

- £1.4m to boost services that support people in Wales to manage problem debt and help maximise their household income.

Homelessness

- Funding to ensure no-one was left without access to accommodation during the pandemic.
- £50m investment to ensure no-one need return to inappropriate accommodation.
- Since the beginning of the pandemic more than 2,200 people have been helped into temporary or emergency accommodation.

Alongside our immediate response to the Coronavirus and the implementation of the actions outlined in this Plan, we are also working at pace to identify what additional interventions could help alleviate the levels of Child Poverty in Wales in the longer term, in line with the reconstruction priorities recently announced by the Welsh Government.

Some of the actions in the Plan will provide us with the evidence and data to inform future development of policy and strategy in this area to ensure they have the maximum impact on the lives of children living in poverty in Wales.

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